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ABSTRACT

Measurements of self worth show that children in segregated schools, both white and black, have unrealistically high aspirations. Mexican-Americans measure lower than other major ethnic groups in feelings of self worth. There is evidence from social investigations, however, that segregation produces feelings of "imposed inferiority" among minority group children. If integration is seen as an opportunity to build a pluralistic society representative of all cultural groups that come together, there is no question that ethnic identity and self worth will be better served after desegregation occurs. The experiences of school districts that have achieved racial balance show that the first step toward equal educational opportunity is total desegregation, not only racial and ethnic but also socioeconomic. Minority children must be taught the basic skills needed to become educated: integration must begin at the beginning. There is no question that minority children can benefit when racial isolation is eliminated. The concern is how to make it occur. (Author/JM)

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THE EFFECT OF DESEGREGATION ON THE MINORITY CHILD.

HOW CAN CHILDREN RETAIN A SENSE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AND INDIVIDUAL SELF WORTH IN AN INTEGRATED CLASSROOM?

What do we mean by self worth?

Self worth is what a person thinks of himself and what he aspires to become. In a sense, it is a judgment one makes about himself as he compares his capacities with those of other people with whom he associates. If his appraisal is correct and his goals realistic he usually acquires a comfortable sense of self assurance and self acceptance.

It is generally thought that minority and low-income children have feelings of worthlessness while children in the white, affluent social strata have high opinions of themselves. This is not necessarily true as people tend to judge themselves in relation to their immediate peers, and within the circumstances of their experience. The frustration of powerlessness and oppression that is observable in minority group children and the anger which this often provokes, is not necessarily a demonstration of low self evaluation.

Measurements of self worth show that children in segregated schools, both white and black, have unrealistically high aspirations. Mexican Americans measure lower than other major ethnic groups in feelings of self worth.

How does segregation affect children?

Integration between races in this country, except for very recent times, occurred primarily in low-income areas. For whites, separation usually implies purposeful exclusiveness by those who can afford to live in the "better areas." Segregation for blacks and browns has been imposed, often by circumstances other than education such as housing, available employment, and other socio-economic factors.

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There is evidence from social investigations that segregation produces feelings of "imposed inferiority" among minority group children. In Berkeley, more Negroes planned to go to college in schools that were predominantly black than in schools where Negroes were in the minority. This was explained as being due to peer support in segregated schools where leadership roles and academic status were gained under limited competition. Negroes in the segregated black schools, however, were less prepared for college than those in the integrated schools.[1]

How do children measure self worth?

Most evaluations of how children feel about themselves conclude that children from minority groups become more realistic in their goals and more positive about themselves in relation to white children after integration. The fact of imposed segregation is always devaluating to racial and ethnic minorities.[2] Unrealistically high aspirations are often a false defense against the sickening feelings of low self worth.

Anglo children in segregated schools, on the other hand, develop an exaggerated sense of self worth in relation to minority children, assuming a superiority which is usually carefully supported by the school itself and is a major reason for the separation in the first place. Because people almost always judge themselves in relation to their peers both in the home and in the school, and because their schools are often highly competitive, Anglos frequently feel incompetent. This perhaps explains their tendency to offset this by over-evaluating their capabilities in relation to minorities. It may be why it is so difficult for the adults in our society to accept minorities on an equal basis.

Why do the segregated feel alienated?

Articles dealing with self identity can be interpreted in several ways. Both Negroes in ghettos and Mexican Americans in barrios have developed, in many cases, close family relationships based on the need for mutual assistance. Their cultural concept of education is survival.[3] The Negro is much more dissatisfied with where he lives than are whites[4] but usually is unable to find any alternative.[5] The need to move out is often expressed in high educational goals. Hopelessness and social isolation are constant depressants to individual self esteem which inhibit any kind of upward movement. Often a ghetto dependency results which causes the individual to remain in the ghetto or barrio even after he is economically able to leave. This phenomenon is sometimes misread as an example of ethnic identity but is more likely to be centered in feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

When 260 Negro and Caucasian junior high students "in a racially integrated school in Detroit"[6] were recently compared, it was found that there was no difference between groups in the way the children perceived themselves. The investigator concluded that "the self-attitudes expressed by [the] study's Negro subjects toward themselves were as favorable as those expressed by the study's Caucasian subjects." The author went on to say that, "As long as this country maintains two separate and unequal societies, it will continue to produce hostile, angry and frustrated Negro youth who see no future in attempting to achieve educationally." This, however, does not directly relate to self-concept according to this study. That "within both racial groups, one will find a variety of self-concepts and attitudes rather than a particular type..." and that "Negro subjects have self-concepts which are no better or worse than those of their Caucasian peers." [7]

Another study, however, which compared Negroes who had moved into integrated areas in Baldwin Hills with those who had remained in the ghettos of West Los Angeles found that "feelings of alienation and powerlessness were significantly less" in the racially mixed areas. The single factor most related to increased self worth was the experience of attending integrated schools.[8]

Why is white desirable?

In almost all tests of race identification Negro children at all ages still tend to select white as more desirable than black although to a lessening degree since the active promotion of blackness by Negro leadership. The implication is that in the eyes of children, the advantages lie with the whites, and they are desirous of sharing in these. Mexican Americans, on the other hand, have tended to divide themselves within their culture, those who could, assimilating with whites. This has to some extent, left the old, the poor, and the less economically secure behind in the barrios.

In Detroit and Ypsilanti, Michigan, self esteem of Negroes was found to be higher in desegregated schools than in segregated ones. Two reasons were believed to cause this. First, to be in a segregated school was in itself a symbol of inferiority and second, the perceptions the Negro children had of the capabilities of whites was highly exaggerated and confused with the obvious power centered in the white community. Desegregated Negroes had learned both to accept and understand whites, and were able to handle their own feeling of racial difference in a much more effective way.[9]

In comparing Negro students in an all-Negro college in Texas with Negroes in a white college which had recently desegregated, also in Texas, it was discovered that the Negroes in both colleges were high in their sense of self worth, but those in the desegregated college were higher.[10]

An interesting investigation into the Mexican American culture in Los Angeles found that Mexican American students born in Mexico received higher grades than those born in California. This was explained by the fact that the longer a family lived in Los Angeles the more it became influenced by segregation. A ghettoization took place that lowered the self esteem of the Mexican American and this affected his achievement in school.[11]

Some other interesting points have been reported about Mexican American self esteem. In Los Angeles it was discovered that the Mexican youth who identified with Mexican culture experienced less conflict, was more education-minded, and had less out-of-school problems including arrests.[12] It can be concluded that Mexican Americans and perhaps all minorities need a sense of cultural belonging. This should be considered as school districts establish integrated classrooms.

How does integration fit into this picture?

It is obvious in looking at what is being reported about ethnic identity, aspirations and self concepts that there is a variety of conclusions, some of them not entirely consistent or supportive of each other. Certainly, when examining the effect that separation or integration has on self acceptance, the circumstances of the integration process must be a critical factor.

If integration is seen as an opportunity to build a pluralistic society representative of all cultural groups that come together, there is no question that ethnic identity and self worth will be better served after desegregation occurs.

Ethnic identity, self esteem, positive feelings of success; all are characteristics developed within the individual as he is growing up. The child who feels isolated either in a segregated or an integrated classroom is going to suffer feelings of inadequacy and devaluation. There is a large amount of evidence that the minority child has been considered inferior by teachers and school administrators. Expectations of low I.Q. and low achievement have become self-fulfilling prophecies for the minorities.

"How can children retain a sense of ethnic identity and individual self worth in an integrated classroom?"

The question, translated into minority group concerns simply asks, "How can my child feel important and be proud of his ethnic heritage in a classroom in which most of his peers and his teachers regard him as inferior?" There is one simple answer to this question. He cannot. Those who are proposing an integrated society must be well aware of their responsibilities to every child to provide for him a learning environment in which he can come to appreciate himself as an individually worthwhile person.

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How Important Is Integration To The Minority Child?

The notion has persisted since the early development of this country that the most law abiding, trustworthy, and moral people, certainly the best workers, are white. This myth has been reinforced by imposed segregation in the educational system which deliberately separates the powerful from the powerless. It does not seem likely that these ingrained ideas will be eliminated until societal integration occurs and all groups get to know and understand and appreciate one another as people.

What Difference Does It Make?

It was found in a study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago that of 1700 Negroes, ages 21 to 45, those who had attended integrated schools averaged $300 a year higher in income than those from segregated schools. More were employed, more men worked in professional or white collar jobs, more had gone to college and fewer had dropped out of school (one third for men and one fifth for women). The integrated scored higher on achievement tests and were more likely to be living in integrated areas. All these could have been called socio-economic factors by assuming that the Negroes in integrated schools were more likely to be living in a higher income area. The fact is that "the kids who went to integrated and segregated schools [were] about the same in parent education, parents' occupation and family stability."1

Recent government figures show the unemployment rate among Mexican Americans to be twice that of Anglos with 79% of those employed holding unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. If these figures included farm workers they would be even more biased against the Mexican American. Anglos, on the average, have 30% higher incomes for the same number of years in school than Mexican Americans.[2] The reason given for this difference in employment status is lack of educational and technical skills. There is no disputing that in general the Mexican American receives less education than the Anglo.

By Court action in Texas in 1970 Mexican Americans were legally labeled "an identifiable ethnic minority group" on the basis of discrimination and segregation in schools, "a discrimination facilitated by the group's economical and political impotence."[3] Even those Mexican Americans who have educational competence, who have passed employment tests and met all skill requirements are often passed over because they are believed by the Anglo employers to be less capable. This treatment has been tested in several recent civil action cases in which the individual Mexican American has benefited. The system that segregated the majority from the minorities, however, continues to breed these inequities. As long as education is basic to the system, it is here that segregation must be eliminated.

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What Can Integration Offer My Child?

The question, "What can integration offer the minority child?" seems to imply not so much what can minority children gain, but what is ahead for my child? Does equal, quality education have to include moving him away from his neighborhood school at an early age?

The experiences of school districts that have achieved district wide racial balance show that the first step toward equal educational opportunity is total desegregation, not only racial and ethnic but also socio-economic. Minority children must be taught the basic skills needed to become educated: reading, arithmetic, language and communication. Integration must begin at the beginning.

What Are The Facts?

It was found in Hartford, Connecticut that inner city minority children who have not experienced the isolated education of the inner city schools in the early grades were reading at grade level or above.[4] Test scores reported for all grade levels in desegregated Berkeley in 1970 show minority group children improving in academic achievement. The greatest improvement was in the earliest grades when children were just beginning their educational experiences.[5]

In Connecticut children from schools that were 85% or greater Negro and Spanish speaking were reassigned to vacant seats in 34 different schools in five suburban communities. The results after testing, interviewing, and reviewing teacher reports showed that reassignment, if done by the third grade, has positive results. Improvement was reported in ability to understand and meet the educational demands of the school, in test-taking skills, and in self-determination.[6]

Four years after desegregation at Riverside minority children in the first three grades were comparable in trend to those of the majority children.[7] Average scores for all children in the first three grades had increased.

When Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Chinese and Jews were compared in New York City it was found that ethnically balanced schools were getting better performance from their pupils than ethnically imbalanced ones. Achievement scores of all ethnic groups were more similar in the balanced schools.[8]

In the city of Nashville fourth, fifth, and sixth grade Negro children in five desegregated schools were compared with the same number of students in three all-Negro schools. All children lived in the same neighborhood. The children who had been in the desegregated schools since early in their schooling scored higher in achievement than either the segregated pupils or the recently desegregated children.[9]

A 1970-71 study reported by the Sacramento Board of Education compared children in integrated schools with children in segregated schools who were given compensatory education, and children in segregated schools with no special educational program offered. Five hundred twenty-eight children were included in the investigation. It was found that the minority children *in integrated classrooms tested an average 10% higher in all grades* (second to sixth) than those in segregated schools who were given special compensatory programs to improve their educational skills. Those children who were segregated and did not receive compensatory education scored the lowest of all. All children involved were from the same neighborhood and all were of similar socio-economic backgrounds.[10]

When Does Desegregation Work?

There is no question that minority children have benefited when racial isolation was eliminated. This has occurred only some of the time, however, and only under favorable circumstances. There have been occasions when children have not shown gain under desegregation. The important fact is that improvement can take place. The concern is how to make it occur.

Stanley Matzen tested eleven hundred fifth and seventh grade children in the San Francisco Bay area. He found that Negroes had higher achievement scores in classrooms that had a relatively lower per cent Negroes. He also found that classroom grouping has much to do with the achievement of the Negroes. When the high achieving whites were separated out into one classroom and the low achieving blacks into another, no gains were made. Other factors such as instruction, attitudes, and expectations were found to influence achievement levels even more than the racial mix. He concluded that racially mixed classrooms, properly integrated, were highly important to the social and emotional development of all the children present.[11]

Why Integration?

To ignore the results of the "separate but equal" experience of the past one hundred years is folly. Compensatory education has not been able to close the achievement gap between the majority and the minority child. If the best of educational opportunities were made available in minority schools, gains undoubtedly would be made. But how realistic is it to expect this to happen? How long would it take? How great would the improvement be? Would parity of educational opportunity occur?

Separation because of ethnic difference sustains and supports prejudice. It appears that until all children of all ethnic groups have an opportunity to interact the educational opportunities of some will be restricted.

--Kathleen Siggers

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WILL THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION DETERIORATE BECAUSE OF INCREASED COST AND OTHER PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN DESEGREGATION?

Quality instruction in schools depends upon what is taught and how. The instructor must be able to present what needs to be learned in ways that all children present can participate. The teacher who was able to accomplish this in the past will most likely be able to continue to do so in a multi-ethnic classroom. That teacher, however, along with all others will have to make some accommodation to change because the composition of the classroom has changed. Most teachers have really experienced only one ethnic culture. Integration requires all teachers to be highly sensitive to and knowledgeable about children from various ethnic backgrounds.

What must be considered as the classroom becomes integrated?

1. The cultural differences among ethnic and racial groups effect the way a child learns and, to some extent, have determined what he has already learned.

2. There are greater individual differences among children within ethnic groups than there are differences between groups.

3. There will tend to be a broader range of achievement in integrated classrooms than in segregated ones because of the educational disadvantagement of ethnic and economic isolation.

4. Heterogeneous grouping must be practiced if integration is to be achieved. This does not eliminate specialized small group or individualized instruction that is homogeneous if this occurs within the general structure of heterogeneity.

5. Teachers will perceive children of ethnic or racial origin other than their own as being different. By the same logic, children will notice differences among teachers from cultures that are not those with which they are accustomed. The ways these differences are understood and resolved will greatly influence the capacity of the child to learn and to advance.

6. Influences outside the classroom will have a bearing on the way the teacher is able to achieve a high quality of instruction. Parent support, community attitudes, school accommodations, positive administrative activity, sensitive counseling services, well-conceived multi-ethnic curriculum materials and meaningful, dynamic in-service training programs will be determining factors.

7. The interaction of children from different ethnic backgrounds and their attitudes toward each other will influence the learning process and the effectiveness of the instruction in the classroom.

Integration is not a result of desegregation. It is a process onto itself that has positive outcomes if educators do a good job of educating children. The teacher is central to the success of the integration process, and quality instruction is part but not all of what the child needs from the teacher and from the school to be an achiever.

What do experts say about the deterioration of instruction during integration?

Schools that have evaluated what happens to students in classrooms that are becoming integrated have found in a large number of cases that the quality of instruction has improved and that achievement levels have gone up. This is probably because educators have been forced to take a broader view of education, its methods, and its goals. Awareness of human individuality has increased. Focus has been placed on the needs of children; how they feel about learning.

Who benefits?

Integration in Jackson, Michigan was found to produce higher achievement levels for both whites and Negroes.[1] Lesser, of Harvard University, reported, "The children from the more integrated schools and neighborhoods showed significantly superior performance when compared with the children from racially imbalanced schools and neighborhoods."[2] This report was based on a study of Negro, Puerto Rican, Chinese, Jewish, and other white children in New York schools. It was found that a notable difference in favor of racially balanced school children occurred among groups who had attended balanced or imbalanced schools for two years or longer in upstate New York.[3]

Berkeley reports higher achievement levels for all children. In Berkeley, the slogan for desegregation became "Equal Quality Education" and the goal was "A year of academic growth for each child for each year spent in the classroom." It became the individual responsibility of each teacher to become competent to reach that goal or to try. All school personnel were enlisted to support the teaching staff in whatever way possible. Three years after desegregating, Berkeley reports that there is still a gap between achievement levels of the majority and minority children, but that all groups have benefited from the effort including the Anglos as they were better prepared to take advantage of the instructional improvements offered.[4]

Sacramento reports that while discipline problems declined each year after desegregation, academic achievement of both black and Spanish Surname children improved. In a special research project,[5] it was found that black children in desegregated classrooms achieved significantly higher than other black children in segregated schools, even those in heavily saturated compensatory education programs. All the children in this study were from the same neighborhoods in Sacramento with similar socio-economic backgrounds.

How is integration achieved?

A large number of studies have been made comparing differences between low-income and minority group achievements with those of the more affluent white population. In almost every case, the minority child has improved in integrated classrooms. This has not been at the expense of the majority child who also improved or stayed at the same academic level as before integration. The important point is that factors other than desegregation were also involved: teacher readiness, community support, and the mix of students assigned both socio-economically and racially.

What is the teacher's role?

Most teachers have been educated in segregated schools. This if true regardless of the ethnic or racial identity of the teacher. To the extent that all segregated education by its nature provides an association and experience with a limited segment of the total population of the country, the adult who is a product of segregated education is less than adequately educated to teach children of other sub-cultures.

Mark Chesler[6] in his writings points out that the teacher is a model for the children in the classroom. Teacher behavior is reflected in student behavior both in the way children respond to the teacher and in the way they treat each other. This places a heavy responsibility on all teachers who become "models" in a multi-ethnic classroom, to demonstrate qualities of humanness that transcend race or ethnicity.

Do instructional services deteriorate as a school system becomes desegregated?

The question is an "iffy" one. If the demands for personal growth, increased skills, and capacity to change are not met by school personnel, it goes without saying that the quality of instruction will be less than acceptable. If these demands are met all children will have the opportunity for the first time in America, to indulge in a personalized, richly meaningful, self-fulfilling education.

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